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ABSTRACT

The nature of the relationship between the disciplinarian (leader) and the disciplined is examined within the context of the role of student staff in college and university residence halls. The manner in which a resident assistant tells and sells, and participates and delegates will have a significant impact on their ability to lead. The proper developmental approach to the discipline process will allow the leader to emerge, but if avoided, mires the disciplinarian and the disciplined in a bog of bad feelings and ill will. Further, if the communication skills of the disciplinarian are poor, the disciplinarian will never be perceived as a leader by the other party. Thus, communication which invites interaction with others that is sincere and reflects genuine concern for those under authority is desirable. Finally, what is required of a true leader is the firm and total belief in, and commitment to, a philosophical approach that is both intrinsically valuing of all human beings and at the same time enlightening, empowering, and uplifting for everyone involved. Contains 28 references. (GLR)

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Leadership in the Disciplinary Relationship

by
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LEADERSHIP IN THE DISCIPLINARY RELATIONSHIP

The very nature of the relationship between the disciplinarian and the disciplined makes the job of effective leadership within that relationship a difficult task at best. It is the true leader, though, that can have their leadership skills shine through in a situation like this. While I speak most directly to the role of residence hall staff members as disciplinarian I believe the premise of the work holds true in all discipline situations.

Perhaps it would be most appropriate to first examine the roles of the staff, and especially of student staff, in college and university residence halls, and then to examine those roles in the light of popularly held definitions of leadership and discipline. Perhaps in that way can we discover crucial elements in each that can be combined to create the judicious leader in the discipline setting.

The resident assistant, and, to a lesser extent, the Hall Director or Head Resident, is expected to be a friend, at least initially, to all who are under their supervision, a counselor, an academic advisor, a resource person, a scholar, an educational programmer, and the disciplinarian for that particular floor or building (Moore, 1969; Smith, 1989; Upcraft, 1982). It should be fairly obvious that the first set of roles will, at some time, conflict with the last, that of disciplinarian. The question then becomes one of balancing the roles.

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Upcraft (1982) has gone so far as to say that "No role gives resident assistants more initial anxiety than enforcing the institution's rules and regulations," and offers the following guidelines for those students who must rise above the usual unpleasantries associated with discipline proceedings, and who can then thrive as leaders on their floors:

1. State your expectations in advance
2. Teach students the rules and the system
3. Be consistent
4. Maintain a good attitude
5. Be honest
6. Be decisive
7. Get help when needed
8. Abide by the rules yourself (pp. 128-130)

It seems perfectly reasonable that the resident assistant who can truly do and be all of these things will be perceived as a leader, a true leader, on their floors or in their buildings. Smith (1989), in fact, has said that the handling of discipline "can be directly linked to [the] effectiveness and success and to the degree of respect that others have for [the resident assistant]" (p. 141).

One clue to the nature of leadership in the disciplinary relationship might be revealed after a closer examination of the types of power residence hall staff have and use, and the leadership styles facilitated by that power. According to

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Upcraft (1982), resident assistants have referent, legitimate, expert, reward, and coercive power, and the judicious use of all five, I am arguing, is the display of leadership in the discipline relationship. Furthermore, the manner in which a resident assistant tells and sells, and participates and delegates (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977) will have a significant impact on their ability to lead, in every sense of the word.

Upcraft (1989) goes on to say that the conscientious, judicious leader/disciplinarian is the resident assistant that is able to exercise whatever legitimate power they may have within the context of the formal authority granted to them (p. 131).

A great deal of work has been done on the nature and practice of discipline in the college setting. Dannells (1988), citing Ardailo (1983), Foley (1947), Gometz & Parker (1968), Ostroth & Hill (1978), Travelstead (1987), and Williamson & Foley (1949), has said that "Much of discipline involves teaching and counseling" (p. 139). Other authors have spoken to the concept of discipline as an activity best left to and regulated by the self (Appleton, Briggs, & Rhatigan, 1978; Dannells, 1988; Hawkes, 1930; Macleod, 1983; MacPeek, 1969; Mueller, 1961; Seward, 1961; Wrenn, 1949).

Still others have written about the opportunity created by the discipline situation as a means of fostering and furthering growth, of both the disciplinarian and the disciplined (Appleton, Briggs, & Rhatigan, 1978; Ardaio, 1983; Benjamin,

1969; Boots, 1987; Caruso, 1978; Dalton & Healy, 1984; Dannells, 1977; Dannells, 1988; Gathercoal, 1990a; Gathercoal, 1990b; Greenleaf, 1978; Ostroth & Hill, 1978; Pavela, 1985; Scheuermann & Sullivan, 1985; Smith, 1978; Smith, 1989; Travelstead, 1987; Williamson, 1965). It is this developmental approach to the discipline process or interaction which allows the leader to emerge, and which, if avoided or ignored, mires the disciplinarian and the disciplined in a bog of bad feelings and ill will.

It might be simplest or most utilitarian to provide a checklist of appropriate practices which serve to establish the disciplinarian as a sincerely concerned and understanding leader and friend, and not as a "bad guy." It seems most appropriate, though, and perhaps even most useful, to simply provide the basis for an appropriate mind-set from which the judicious disciplinarian can operate, a mind-set which allows the one in authority to direct the interaction and which enables the leader to empower, to "lift up" everyone involved, and to make them feel, in fact, uplifted.

It seems a given that what one says is rarely as important as what one does, or even as the way in which one says the things they do. It might seem somewhat paradoxical, then, to suggest that one of the keys to leadership within the discipline episode is communication. Emerson has said that "What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." That is never truer than when one is asked to advise, befriend, counsel, and

discipline people with whom one lives. And so it is with the disciplinarian who hopes to be a leader.

If the communication skills of the disciplinarian are poor, whether in the discipline situation, or in the execution of day-to-day duties (or both), the disciplinarian will **never** be perceived as a leader by the other party. While an exhaustive list of exemplary communication skills would be inappropriate, and probably impossible to create, communication that invites interaction with others, that is sincere, and that reflects a genuine concern for all with whom the authority communicates is desirable or perhaps even requisite.

In addition, the texts of Gathercoal (1990a, 1990b) provide somewhat of a philosophical base, a rubric under which a judicious style of leadership and management can be developed. And while the premise is codified in a list of what he calls "Disciplinary Practices to Avoid," the astute disciplinarian can rise above the "cookbook" format of the theory and recognize the values inherent within.

Disciplinary Practices to Avoid

1. Never demean a student of a group of students
2. Never summarily dismiss a student, or send them away
3. Never compare students
4. Never demand respect
5. Never be dishonest with students
6. Never accuse students of not trying

7. Never get into a power struggle
8. Never flaunt the fact that you are the one in authority
9. Never become defensive or lose control of your feelings
10. Never use fear and intimidation to control students
11. Never punish the group
12. Never act too quickly
13. Never say "this is easy"
14. Never say "you will thank me someday"
15. Never think being consistent means treating all students alike

(1990a, pp. 125-129)

(1990b, pp. 108-114)

While a number of authors have offered advice about reasonable approaches to the discipline relationship (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981; Dannells, 1988; Moore, 1969), there seems to be a missing ingredient in their cookbook approaches. And that one ingredient usually separates the leaders from the non-leaders. In other leadership situations, the ingredient might be called "passion." In the discipline relationship, it is called "compassion."

Gathercoal describes it best when he says that

> [d]eveloping the [proper relationship] begins with identifying issues central

> to the group living, educational, and self-esteem needs of students as well as to the mission and ethical practices of residence hall staff. (p. 41)

Leadership in the discipline relationship is as difficult to show as it is difficult to describe. Lists of "do's" and "don't's" are helpful, but inadequate. What is required is the firm and total belief in, and commitment to, a philosophical approach that is both intrinsically valuing of all human beings and at the same time enlightening, empowering, and uplifting for everyone involved. Only under these circumstances is the disciplinarian truly a leader.

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